

X 1609/2689.

A
SERMON,

preached

In the Parish Church of St. MARY,
NOTTINGHAM,

On Wednesday, February 27th,
1799:

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED
FOR
A General Fast.

BY ROBERT WOOD, A. M.

Of St. John's Coll. Camb.

CURATE of St. MARY's, NOTTINGHAM.

NOTTINGHAM:

Printed at Burbage and Stretton's Office.

1799.

MEMORANDUM



TO THE HONORABLE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

FROM THE CHIEF OF BUREAU

RE: [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

*TO THE FRIENDS,
Who requested the publication of the following Discourse,
It is with humility inscribed,
By their affectionate and faithful Servant,*

THE AUTHOR.

MARCH 14th.

1609/2689.



JEREMIAH,—CHAP. 18, VER. 7th, and 8th.

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it: If that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.

IN several verses preceding those of the text, the Prophet, by the direction of God, under the type of a potter, represents to the people of Israel, the sovereign authority and influence which He has over them, and all other nations and kingdoms of the earth. "Behold, (saith God) as "clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel." As the potter hath power over the clay, and can fashion it as seemeth good unto him; so hath God power over the children of men. "Thou, O Lord, art our father: we are "the clay, and thou art the potter; and we all are "the work of thy hand. Thou doest according to "thy will in the armies above, and among the inhabitants upon earth." The children of Israel being, by this allusion, made sensible of their dependence

upon God ; the prophet, in a beautifully simple manner, calculated at once to excite the reflections, and fix the attention of his hearers, upbraids them for the wickedness which they had repeatedly, and without any provocation, committed against their acknowledged Lord and King. Lest, however, a review of their past misconduct, and a fearful looking for of the just judgments of God might, on the one hand, overwhelm them with the gloom of despondency ; or, on the other, “ the long-suffering mercy and goodness of God, and sentence not being speedily executed against evil doers, might make their hearts fully set to do evil continually ;” the Prophet in a few, but comprehensive words, endeavours to deliver them from the former melancholy condition, and to deter them from falling into the latter.—
 “ At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation,
 “ and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to
 “ pull down, and to destroy it ; if that nation against
 “ whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil,
 “ I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto
 “ them. But if it do evil in my sight, if it obey
 “ not my voice, then I will repent of the good
 “ wherewith I said I would benefit them.”

That this declaration of God hath often been verified, we need only to look into the history of the Jews to be convinced.



As long as the Jewish nation lived in perfect obedience to the mandates of their omnipotent Jehovah ; acknowledged him to be their everlasting Lord and only master ; as long as they paid him the homage and reverence which he required from them ; while they had “ no fellowship with the “ unfruitful works of darkness, but did rather re- “ prove them” ; as long as virtue was their guide, and innocence their companion ; so long were they happy, so long were they prosperous. God esteemed them as “ the apple of his eye ; the Lord “ was their defence, and the Holy One of Israel was “ their king.” But no sooner had they asserted their independence, by throwing off their allegiance to God, and crying out, “ who are they which be “ lords over us, and who will shew us any good ?”

no sooner had they fallen into idolatry, the sin against which God had expressly cautioned them ; gone after strange nations, learned their ways, and become partakers of all kinds of wickedness ; no sooner had they wilfully shut their ears to the voice of instruction, and refused “ to do justly, to love “ mercy, and to walk humbly with their God ;” no sooner was vice become paramount to virtue ; disobedience to submission ; and ingratitude to love ; than the presence of God was visibly with-

drawn from them; the sun which enlightened, and the shield which protected them, by degrees, refused their wonted offices;—strangers were adopted when the children deserted their parents; and the Gentiles were received into covenant with God, when the Jews had forfeited it.

It was not, however, till after repeated warnings; till the harvest of their iniquities was fully ripe, and the measure of their wickedness overflowed; till they had committed the most atrocious crimes, murdered the only begotten Son of God, and presumptuously prayed that “his blood might be upon them and upon their children”; it was not till their guilt was become thus flagrant, & their provocations thus unpardonable, that God cast them off; “caused his wrath to be known; poured out the vials of his fury upon them;” and reduced them to the miserable state, in which they are to this day seen; a standing monument of divine vengeance inflicted upon the children of disobedience; “a proverb and a reproach; fugitives and vagabonds upon the face of the earth.”

Though the words of the text, in their primary sense, are applicable only to the Jewish nation; yet, since St. PAUL has told us, that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable

“for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”; we may, and ought, to consider ourselves not a little interested in them. It becomes us to take warning from the example of others; to shun the gulph in which they foundered, and the rock upon which they split; to secure the favor of God by pursuing a conduct different from that by which they lost it; and from their danger to provide for our own safety.

It has been already shewn, that the Wickedness of the Inhabitants was the Cause of the Ruin of the Jewish nation: The instructive inference deducible from thence is, that national sins will produce national ruin; for a like cause will produce the like effect.

There are many, it is to be feared, who, tho’ they assent, in theory, to the doctrine above stated; yet, in practice, shamefully disregard it; and there are, it is to be lamented, too many who think there are no powers superior to those which are visible; that whatever is effected is done by human instrumentality; that victory is the necessary concomitant of strength; and that the events of war and peace are in human counsels, not in the divine.

It will scarcely be denied that there are some occurrences in life, which, in a greater or less degree, tend to beget infidelity in the minds of the weak, the ignorant, the licentious: such, for instance, are "seeing the ungodly in great prosperity," and the righteous in adversity; in beholding the arms of the infidel crowned with success, whilst those of the apparently faithful are defeated; in often witnessing that "the race is to the swift, and the battle to the strong."

It is from this cause, that the inhabitants of a nation, which once deservedly ranked high among the kingdoms of Europe, are now, almost generally, become infidels and atheists: I mean, at least, the uninformed vulgar. Having had unparalleled success in a series of critical actions and situations; having, like locusts in the land of Egypt, or the irresistible torrent, borne down, by their Herculean Phalanxes, every obstacle which came in their way; they have ascribed the victory to their own strength and valour: and, initiated in a philosophy, admitting nothing to be fact, which is not strictly demonstrable; many, whose talents would, otherwise, have reflected the greatest honour upon their country, have volunteered their services in the cause of Infidelity; and have presumptuously come forth

with the polished weapons of human reason to strike at the irresistible root of Revelation, and give Religion its deep, its deadly wound.

It is to be hoped there are none of this description amongst us; none who do not with grateful humility acknowledge the providence and sovereignty of God; but if, unfortunately, there be any, it becomes us, in the true spirit of christian charity, to pray to God that their errors may be removed; their understandings illumined; and their sins, whether secret or presumptuous, forgiven.

We are this day assembled together, in obedience to the paternal commands of our pious Sovereign, to humble ourselves before Almighty God; to deprecate the unhappy contest in which we, and almost all Europe, have, alas! been too long involved; to entreat of God the forgiveness of our sins; to beg a blessing upon our enterprises civil and religious, and a restoration of those desirable, valuable blessings--the blessings of reconciliation and peace.

This is the seventh time (and, O God, may it be the last) that we have thus publicly, and solemnly met together, during our present protracted

war with France ; and yet, we cannot say that the strings of the bow are slackened ; the arms of the warrior weakened ; or the aspect of the times less critical now, than at the commencement of the war. As the clouds in a storm of thunder are driven about in wild disorder, and threaten an immediate deluge ; or the ground, before an earthquake, has its bowels convulsed ready to burst forth ; so the present political state of Europe teems big with expectation, and time, and time only, can discover what it will bring forth. Our prayers have been repeatedly poured forth, and our requests made known unto God ; and though he hath promised, in the most unequivocal manner, " that if we call upon him in our troubles, and turn to him, he will hear us from his holy heaven, and save us from the hands of them that hate us," --yet we see that his promise is not come to pass ; we are yet " fast bound in misery," and calamities surround us on every side.

Shall we, from this, daringly ask, like the proud Pharaoh, " who is the Lord, that we should obey his voice ?" or with the Infidel, " what profit shall we have if we pray unto him ?" God forbid ! Rather let us refrain our presumption, and

moderate our pride by the belief, that if we have asked and not received, something has been amiss either in the matter or manner of our asking.---

"Ye ask, (saith St. James) and receive not, because ye ask amiss." Let us not charge God, "who cannot lie, but who keepeth the promises which he made to a thousand generations"; let us not charge him with a breach of faith; no: rather let us look into our own lives and conversation, and examine the conditions upon which the promises of God are made to us; and we shall have sufficient reason to exclaim, "thy truth, O God, endureth for ever; thy righteousness is from everlasting; thou hast done justly, but we have sinned."

In the words of the text, God says, "if a nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." Have we then, on our parts, punctually complied with the express conditions of God? Have we turned from our evil ways, and returned unto the Lord our God in hearty repentance, in sincerity and truth? Let us pause for a moment; let us appeal to our own consciences; let us lay our hands upon our hearts; and then with cool recollection, as in the awful presence of

the Almighty, and before the tribunal of an Omniscient Judge; let us ask ourselves whether our sins be not as many, and our vices as glaring now, as they were seven years ago, when we first met on the like solemn occasion? Have we eradicated one single vice, and planted an opposite virtue in its room? alas! it is but too true, with our lips we have promised much, but performed little in our hearts. Our words have been contrary to our actions, and our actions inconsistent with our faith.

Should what has been asserted require a proof, we may advert to the state of Religion. Hath not Religion, natural and revealed, but especially the latter branch of it; hath not revealed Religion, the surest Anchor of our hopes; the poor man's best Friend, and the rich man's brightest Ornament; the sick man's best Physician, and the greatest Refiner of the occupations and amusements of him who is in health; hath it not of late years declined much amongst us? Is the Lord's day less profaned; are the moral and religious duties more punctually discharged; are our jails less crammed with criminals; are our slumbers less disturbed by midnight orgies; our streets less paraded by wretches at once to be pitied and despised; our high-ways

less infested with robbers; our doors less beset with vagrants whom it is often a crime for charity to relieve; do they who move in the higher circles of life set a brighter example for piety, conjugal fidelity, domestic harmony, chaste conversation, temperate conduct?—To propose questions of this nature would be tedious indeed; let this then suffice; let every one judge from experience, from what he sees and hears, and then let him give an open, ingenuous, unbiassed verdict, whether, in his opinion, the heterogeneous mass of wickedness and vice be not as great now as it was at the commencement of the present war. If so, then vain have been our promises of amendment, and equally illusive must be our expectations and hopes of receiving help and protection from God.

Let us not, for shame, thus slumber away our years; neither let us imagine that “the Judge of all the earth” will always bear thus with our hypocrisies: No—the Divine Grace will in time fail in patience: for though God bore long with the hypocrisies of the Egyptians, yet he at last overwhelmed them in the Red Sea; and though the decree against Tyre, Sodom, Gomorrah, and Nineveh, was, from time to time, deferred on account of their inhabitants shewing some tokens of repent-

ance, yet it was at last accomplished. For sincerity there is forgiveness in store, but for dissembling repentance there is no atonement:

The words of the text being thus explained, and our own imperfections being thus unreservedly discussed, I might here, with less violence than otherwise against christian charity, or the pious designs of this day's solemnity, direct your attention towards the conduct of our enemies, and attempt a comparison between their depravities and our own.

But how, alas! shall we enter upon this; or where shall we begin the black catalogue? To do justice to the cause is, I confess, beyond my humble powers; to draw a true portrait of their vices is above my art; to recount their wickednesses and vices must put modesty to the blush; and to think upon their unexampled barbarities, must cause the heart to bleed, which is not hard as flint, and the bosom to glow with indignation, which is not cold as ice. Let us, therefore, pass over their immoralities, their perfidies, their oppressions: We will say nothing of their having converted churches into taverns, and altars to the most shameful uses: We will wave the mention of the dishonour they have done to God's holy name and word: We will not

offend the delicate ear by saying, with their historian, that they have rifled the very mansions of the dead; that the wife has been a passive spectator in seeing the bones of her deceased husband disturbed for the sake of the sheet of lead in which they reposed: The sanguinary feats which, tyger-like, they have committed; the thousands whom they have reduced to the most abject misery; the disconsolate widows they have wronged; the orphans whom they have robbed; the innocence which they have seduced; the integrity which they have bribed; the friends whom they have betrayed; the diabolical schemes which they have planned, and put in execution; these, with numberless other vices and crimes too shocking for a heart of tender sensibility to dwell upon; we will leave to be developed in the history of France since the commencement of the Revolution.

Sinners, yea, and miserable sinners, as we all acknowledge ourselves to be; we are willing to believe that we are not arrived at that latitude of wickedness, at which, we are informed, our enemies have. We have not yet disowned, if we have dishonoured God; we have not yet pulled down, if we have forsaken the house of prayer; we have not yet given up our hopes of Heaven, nor our fears

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of Hell; we have not yet discarded all sense of decorum and respect; our friends and allies we have not betrayed, as the traitor Judas did his Saviour "with a kiss"; like an Annibal (but why instance in a Carthaginian) like some of the French Directory, we have not vowed eternal hatred against our enemies; no, on the contrary, we have more than once, during the present conflict, shewn our pacific disposition; more than once we have evidenced our aversion for war, and our wishes for mutual accommodation.

This is not said with a studious view to justify ourselves; nor "to bring railing accusation" against our enemies. To assert our own innocence would be presumption; to exaggerate their guilt would be a crime.

Though the successes of our enemies have been uncommonly brilliant, and laurels have crowned their standards; yet, let us not adopt their creed, let us not ape their evil examples. Felicity is not always the offspring of success, nor is prosperity always a criterion of God's being pleased with the ways and manners of the conquerors. God permitted the heathen nations to harass and punish the Jews, though the Jews were much better than they: And why may not modern France be a like instru-

ment in the hands of Providence, to chastise and reform those nations who, like the Jews of old, "have departed from their Maker, have waxen "fat in their abundance"; given themselves up to unbounded licentiousness; "put their trust in man," and their confidence in the number of their forces?

Many well-disposed, and not enthusiastical persons, are of this way of thinking: many believe that France is the rod directed by the Almighty to punish those nations of Europe, which have embraced their immoralities, and copied their vices.

Should this be a fact, a very conclusive reason may be assigned for our present sufferings. We have adopted too much of their wickedness: their customs and manners we have made too much our own: and, had not a Superior Power stopped us in our career; in a few years more, we should have been as complete adepts as they in the arts of debasing dignified nature; in committing the blackest crimes under the sanction of gallantry; and the most detestable vices under the semblance of virtues.

That France has both persecuted other nations, and is persecuted herself, no one will deny. Ask of Switzerland, a nation once warlike, brave, hospi-

table, free: Ask of Egypt famed in sacred history: Ask of Italy, once the garden of Europe, the mother of arts and sciences, the bar of eloquence: Ask of Spain, emblem of perfidy, timidity, cowardice: Ask these, and other nations which it would be easy to mention, whether they have not, to their sorrow, felt the weight of persecution, the horrors and devastations of war. Ask of France too, if, whilst she persecutes other nations, she is not persecuted herself: is she not convulsed at her own heart; has not the sword penetrated even her own bosom? most certainly it has. What then are the fruits; what are the boasted advantages which the French, or any other nation which hath adopted their revolutionizing principles, have acquired? Are they more happy; are they more free? Have they not in their struggles for liberty found their hands tied behind them, and a bridle put upon their lips? has not the monarchical sceptre been changed for a rod of iron? has not a governing Claudius been succeeded by a directorial Nero?

Revolution! oh! what uncertainty attends thy issue!---O War, how dire are thy effects!

It appears then, my brethren, that the present war is peculiar in its nature, and more momentous than any which stands recorded in the history of Europe.

I have already extended my discourse beyond the usual length; the importance of the subject, however, shall be my apology, which, I anticipate, will be admissible by the very respectable, and loyal audience I now address: I will, therefore, not detain you much longer, but proceed to the conclusion.

To conclude.---We have now in a solemn, and it is to be hoped, in a very sincere manner, in the presence of Almighty God, acknowledged our own unworthiness, and his justice under all his dispensations. We have implored God for Success upon our Endeavours, besought him to avert from us the Horrors and Calamities of war, and to restore unto us, and to all other belligerent nations, the blessings of peace. We are not assembled together, as some deluded persons imagine, to curse, or to pray, like Elias, that "fire may come down from "heaven" upon our enemies, "and destroy them;" no: our Religion teaches us to pray for our enemies: and the worst wish towards them, dictated by christian charity, is, that God would "strike "them in his mercy with remorse and compunc- "tion, before they fill up the measure of their ini- "quities"; bring them back to a sense of their duty, and restore unto them the happiness they have lost.

Let us, then, on our parts, do that, which alone can make our prayers effectual: let us "turn from our evil ways, and return unto the Lord our God; for then he will have mercy upon us." Though he come late to our assistance, yet he will most assuredly come; "for he hath never failed to assist those who put their trust and confidence in him." Let us not deceive ourselves, with the supposition, that the pious design of this solemnity can be obtained by one day's humiliation and repentance; no: "the good work which we have begun we must continue to perform; we must go and sin no more."

May God Almighty give us resolutions, and endue us with power so to do. May our manifold sins and wickedness never, for the future, provoke the Lord to punish us with plague, pestilence, or famine, with battle, murder, or sudden death. May the evils which have arisen from the French Revolution make such an impression upon the good sense of Englishmen, as to create in them an utter abhorrence, and detestation, of bringing the like about in their native country. May their prudence teach them not to be decoyed into slavery, by the spacious, but delusive baits, Liberty, Fraternity, Equality. May Sedition, privy Conspiracy, and

Rebellion be known only by name; and remembered only to be avoided. May our Country, as it has been, still continue to be the happiest upon earth; may its Fidelity and Integrity towards its allies never be tarnished. May we all, like brethren, live together in harmony; may the discontented become reconciled; and all party competition laid aside, when union of sentiment and energy of action are indispensably necessary for our Country's cause. May Religion, "pure and undefiled," flourish; may good order be always established amongst us; may there be "peace within our borders, and plenitude within our palaces"; may our days upon earth be spent in blissful tranquility, and a well-spent life rewarded with immortality and glory.



